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Elegy for a Metaphor: Dogwood/Pear
Tree · *Michael S. Harper*

for Robert Hayden and James Wright

Whatever city or country road
you two are on
there are nettles,
and the dark invisible
elements cling to your skins
though you do not cry
and you do not scratch
your arms at 45 degree angles
at the landing points of a swan
in the Ohio, the Detroit River;

at the Paradise Theatre
you named the cellist
with the fanatical fingers
of the plumber, the exorcist,
and though the gimmickry at wrist
and kneecap could lift the seance
table, your voice was real
in the gait and laughter of Uncle
Henry, who could dance on either
leg, wooden or real, to the sound
of the troop train megaphone,
catching the fine pitch of a singer
on the athletic fields of Virginia.

At the Radisson Hotel
we once took a fine angel
of the law to the convention center
and put her down as an egret
in the subzero platform of a friend—
this is Minneapolis, the movies
all of strangers, holding themselves
in the delicacy of treading water,
while they wait for the trumpet
of the 20th century limited
over the bluff or cranny.

You two men like to confront
the craters of history and spillage,
our natural infections of you
innoculating blankets and fur,
ethos of cadaver and sunflower.

I hold the dogwood blossom,
eat the pear, and watch the nettle
swim up in the pools
of the completed song
of Leadbelly and Little Crow
crooning the buffalo and horse
to the changes and the bridge
of a twelve-string guitar,
the melody of *Irene*;
this is really goodbye—
I can see the precious stones
of embolism and consumption
on the platinum wires of the mouth:
in the flowing rivers, in the public baths
of Ohio and Michigan.